

Webster (Jas)

ADDRESS

TO

THE GRADUATES

OF

GENEVA MEDICAL COLLEGE.

DELIVERED IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, GENEVA, JANUARY 26, 1841.

BY JAMES WEBSTER, M. D.,

*Professor of Anatomy and Physiology, Corresponding Member of the Medical Society of
London, &c. &c.*

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE GRADUATES.

123374
Washington, D.C.

ROCHESTER:

SHEPARD & STRONG'S PRESS.

1841.



At a meeting of the Medical Graduates of Geneva College, held immediately after the Commencement, on January 26, 1841, ASA TUPPER was appointed Chairman, when the following resolutions were adopted :

Resolved, That whilst we cordially respond to the sentiments contained in the able and interesting parting Address of Prof. J. WEBSTER, we hope to profit from his admonitions.

Resolved, That a copy of his Address be requested of Prof. W. for publication.

ASA TUPPER, Chairman.

ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN—

THIS day the interesting associations which have so long bound us together, are to be forever broken; we are now to part, many of us to meet no more this side the grave, and on this pleasing but melancholy occasion it becomes my duty, on behalf of my colleagues, to offer you a parting word of admonition, and to bid you a hearty God-speed in the great object of your mission.

This day, the interesting relations in which we have so long stood to each other, are dissolved—preceptor and pupil no longer, you go forth upon an equality with us; as the reward of diligence and industry you carry with you hence, the highest honors of our profession to gladden the hearts, and to cheer the hopes of parents and friends. Whilst we rejoice with you in your rejoicing; whilst we sympathize with you in your hopes, and whilst we offer up our warmest aspirations for your professional success, and your personal happiness, we cannot allow the parting moment to pass by unnoticed and unfelt—we look back through the long vista of the past and many old and kindly remembrances spring up before us in their original freshness, casting a not unpleasant gloom over the parting hour. You go hence in the buoyancy of youth; the allurements in the paths to fame and fortune are beckoning you onward; your hopes and expect-

tations are raised, and you are anxious and eager for the time when you may act your part on the great stage of life—yet you cannot leave us without one parting tear of kindness, one sigh of fond regret, for old preceptors and cherished friends.

Standing in this relation, then ; surrounded as you are by these numerous witnesses of your triumph ; the smiles of youth and of beauty, and the presence of the wise and the aged, shedding a soothing influence over the scene around you—on this sacred spot, consecrated to the worship of the living God, listen now to the last, the parting admonitions of those who feel a deep, and an abiding interest in your prosperity here, and your welfare hereafter.

The period of your pupilage has terminated ; you have completed the education of manhood ; an eventful epoch in your lives has arrived, and henceforth your position to society assumes a new and most important aspect. To say that we share in your anxieties, is but to say that we feel accountable in a great degree for your future professional career—we have this day invested you with high honors, and as you may bear them for usefulness and distinction, so will your professional parent reap a rich reward in the approving verdict of the community. Thus you perceive that your responsibilities to us, do not cease when you leave the precincts of the College—*we are part and parcel in the bond*—and in giving our endorsement to your competence for the discharge of the important duties which may be entrusted to your care, we do so with a confidence in your unceasing devotion to your profession, in your high and honorable bearing to your fellows, and in the hope, springing from our knowledge of you, that our anticipations may be fully realized, and that in whatever section of our wide-spread country Providence may cast your lot, we shall have cause of

exultation in the character, the standing, and the professional success of our Alumni. Remember, gentlemen, that you now go forth as the defenders of the Medical Department of Geneva College; you are the champions upon whom we must mainly rely in an honorable warfare with rival Institutions; to you is entrusted in some degree, the charge of our skill and reputation as teachers,—we ask you but to persevere in the course you have so well begun; to gird your professional armor tightly around you; to strengthen your weak, and to guard your strong points, and we have no fears for the issue on sending you forth to the encounter.

You are now about to enter upon the practical duties of your profession, and you have no doubt closely scanned its requirements for their faithful performance. The duties of the Physician are of the most interesting, and sometimes of the most painful kind: from the very nature of his profession, he is compelled to enter into the arcana of the domestic concerns of families; to watch over the bed of sickness, and to minister to the wants and to the necessities of the afflicted; to keep alive the drooping spirits of friends and relatives, and when the pale horse of the Conqueror tramples over the dying, to mitigate the sufferings and to soothe the anguish that precede the passage to the dim sepulchre of death. Our profession, in some form, is co-eval with the sufferings and the sorrows of the human race: it is a glorious privilege to minister to a mind diseased; to pour the healing balm into the bleeding wound; to lull the pangs and to assuage the sufferings of humanity—Divinity himself has set his seal upon it.

Thus reflecting upon his duties and responsibilities, then, the conscientious physician moves in an atmosphere peculiarly his own—constantly exerting all his energies for the

alleviation of human suffering ; selecting from the vast store-house of nature, the varied resources for the due exercise of his art ; necessarily engaged in a wide and extensive range of scientific inquiry ; daily witnessing the afflictions of his fellow men—at one time cheered by the successful application of remedial means, whilst at another he is compelled to mourn over the failure of his best directed efforts, he learns to cultivate a feeling of dependence on that Almighty Being in whom he moves and lives, and without whose aid he could accomplish nothing.

Just entering as you are upon the busy world, to participate in its cares, its pleasures and its anxieties, may I ask you to tarry with me a little, whilst I admonish you of some of the dangers which, even at the onset of his career, beset the paths of the young professional man—and when you remember how many cherished anticipations are raised, how many cheering hopes are entertained for your prosperity, and how many an anxious prayer this day ascends the throne of Grace in your behalf, from those who nourished you in infancy, solaced you in youth, and now cherish you in manhood, surely you will give me a patient and a listening ear at this our parting, and mayhap will profit, feeble as may be the effort to direct you in the paths of virtue and of honor.

At this late period you need not be reminded of the many trying situations in which you are likely to be placed ; of the numerous class of cases which will demand prompt and immediate aid, and which will admit of not an instant delay—these cases, embodying all the varieties of accidents and injuries, are more or less urgent ; all require instant attention, and generally there are by-standers who are eagerly looking on, and noticing the conduct and bearing of the practitioner : if he be at all at a loss, they do not fail to observe, nor are they slow to publish it to the world, thus inflicting an injury

from which he can scarce hope to recover. If on the contrary, he is prompt and efficient in the hour of danger ; cool and collected in the midst of scenes which are appalling to the feeling heart ; for the moment heedless of all around him, even the lamentations of family and friends, and intent only on the safety of his patient, he builds a reputation on the instant, and is borne in triumph along the current of popular favor. It is on such occasions as these, gentlemen, when the life of a fellow being is hanging by a single thread, then it is, I say, that you will require the clear eye, the cool head, and the steady hand.

In this connexion, then, what need I say in reference to the necessity of the STRICTEST TEMPERANCE ? It is not my intention to read you a homily on this subject, but I feel it an imperative duty now to warn you of the snares which may be laid for you,—of the temptations which, in a thousand ways, may be thrown across your path, and of the importance of early and decisive action on this point, to guard against consequences which cannot be otherwise than destructive to your moral, as well as your intellectual and physical being.

Time was when the physician could scarce enter the house of a patient without being invited to partake of the hospitalities of the bottle ; it was difficult to resist the importunities of well-meaning friends, and thus the habit of indulging was acquired by many a valued and even brilliant member of our profession who little thought, when thus acquiescing, that he was destined to die the drunkard's death, and to fill the drunkard's grave !

Thanks to the progress of an improved morality, and an enlightened and just philanthropy, a change has come over the spirit of the times—and to the members of our profession, as much as to any other class of the community, is the world

indebted for the onward march of a cause which bears "healing on its wings;" which is calculated to elevate the tone of moral feeling; to close the avenues of vice and immorality; to give to virtue its own reward, and to nerve the arm and to animate the breast of the patriot and the philanthropist.

Thus we have seen a cause feeble in its infancy, commencing by small beginnings—at first only under the influence of individual effort and personal example—next engaged in with vigor and perseverance by communities—finally spreading its benign and happy influence, until we have lived to see a whole nation uniting, almost as one man, in the high and holy emprise—and if "the harp that once through Tara's Halls" resounded, has long been hushed, it now sings sweetly, and every note vibrates on the ear, as it is borne upon the wings of the wind, accompanied by the glad voices of millions of freedmen uniting around the banner of temperance, in one grand chorus, of Erin regenerate and disenthralled!

It becomes you, then, in setting forth upon the voyage of life, to lend the influence of your names and your example, in a cause so intimately blended with your personal happiness and prosperity, and having so important a bearing upon your future professional success. Let me exhort you, graduates of Geneva College, at this, the last opportunity which will ever be afforded me of addressing you collectively as your friend and adviser—let me earnestly and most affectionately entreat you to ponder deeply and thoughtfully upon this momentous subject. By the solemn obligations you have now assumed—by the duty you owe to those who have trained you up from infancy to manhood—by your veneration for the memory of departed friends—by your hopes and aspirations for the future—by your obligations to yourselves

and to society, and as you hope for the glorious immortality of God,—I charge you,—now and ever—shun the intoxicating draught!

Let us turn now to the consideration⁷ of other matters which will demand your constant attention, if you would pass through life with the respect and esteem of the community, and if you would be sustained by your own consciousness of rectitude of action and of principle. It is barely possible that, some among you may regard this as the day which is to free you from the trammels of laborious study—that in the associations which rise up to your view, you may see already in store for you, a rich and luxuriant harvest which requires only the reaping to repay you for years of toil and labor—if such opinion be entertained by any of you, believe me, my friend, you are doomed to bitter and unceasing disappointment; such anticipations will, ignis-fatuus like, lead you far astray from the true line of duty, and before your frail barque has fairly entered upon the bosom of the ocean of life, she will present an unmanageable wreck, tossed by every contending current, till finally she disappears amid the billows. Such anticipations, then, must not for a moment be entertained, and whilst I have no wish to dampen the ardor of a youthful aspirant to professional favor; whilst I would rather cheer him in his onward course, and encourage him to sustain with calmness the many difficulties he will have to encounter, yet is it proper he should be admonished that, if he rightly regards the honor, the dignity and the importance of his profession, his life must be one of privation, of patient endurance, of unceasing toil and labor.

You are to remember that in closing your collegiate course, the character of your studies must to a certain extent be changed; thus far you have aimed only for the rudiments, the

elements, the first detached principles of a medical education—these you are now to combine and labor with, in order that you may observe how the great fabric stands as a whole, and if possible to evolve something new and valuable. The lessons you have thus far received are to be kept fresh in your memory, and hence they must often be recurred to; your knowledge must be kept from decreasing; but to increase it, you must extend your researches to sources hitherto unexplored; you are on no account to relax in your efforts for the acquisition of knowledge, and every leisure moment is to find you the diligent, the devoted, the attentive student. The first few years of the young physician's life is an anxious and a trying season; but it is the season which if carefully cultivated by reading, by reflection, and by thought, will be daily leading you along the avenues of time in pleasant company, whilst you will thus be daily better fitting yourselves for the faithful discharge of the solemn duty which you owe yourselves, your country, and your God—and thus, too, you will enjoy the pure and exulting satisfaction of an approving conscience, whilst you will receive the grateful plaudits of an admiring world. It is the season, too, in the life of the young physician, which, if allowed to pass in inglorious ease, unmarked by effort, by exertion and improvement, when if he listens to the song of the siren sloth, bearing in her train every vice which can degrade the soul, will inevitably bear him onward to the great ocean of the past, unwept, unhonored and unsung.

Observe those two physicians—both are in the prime of life—twelve years ago they started together in the race for fame—one possessed the influence of wealth, of family, of friends, with the advantages of a commanding and vigorous intellect, a polished education and varied and extensive

knowledge—the other possessed none of these adventitious aids; by dint of industry and perseverance at a mechanical occupation, he was enabled to acquire a medical education, and but few then thought of the poor mechanic—now mark the change! time has rolled on; one abandoned study when he left the school; he depended on resources which have failed him; he fell behind his profession, and now plods his weary way, a mere practitioner of habit, with scarce professional reputation enough to shield him from contempt—the other never for a moment relaxed his efforts, but continued to apply himself with increased vigor to his professional studies, and although not endowed with the same natural abilities, nor possessing the same advantages as the former, he has far outstripped him in the race, and now stands among the foremost of his age in the profession, thus illustrating a familiar truth, that distinction is to be regarded more as the result of moral effort, than of intellectual superiority—rather of the fixed determination, than of the mere ability to acquire it.

A point of great importance to you when you shall commence the practice, is to cultivate the society and good feeling of the well-informed of your professional brethren, and to elicit from them, as much as possible, the results of their experience in practice; in this way you may often acquire knowledge that will be useful to you in every day life, and which may also extend your usefulness to others. It is unfortunately too frequent an occurrence in these days, to meet with young men fresh from the schools, who pride themselves upon their modern learning, who entertain high notions of their medical acumen, and who are apt to look with improper feelings upon what they are often pleased to term, the antiquated notions of old practitioners. It is an

unpleasant sight to witness a popinjay in physic setting himself up in the face of gray hairs and experience. Granting a young man to be talented, and to be well grounded in his profession—to have had superior advantages, if you will—yet modesty is inseparable from worth, and the young man who oversteps its bounds will find when too late, that he has over-estimated himself, whilst the community have placed him precisely at his par value. Let your intercourse with your seniors, then, be marked by the most scrupulous regard to propriety, and thus you will not only secure their esteem and respect, but you will find that if required, they will cheer, encourage and support you.

On the subject of good feeling towards one another among members of the profession in general, I have a few words to say. It has often been remarked of medical men, that they are apt to display too much, a want of harmony among themselves, and thus a stigma is cast upon the whole profession. There is no doubt that occasions very frequently occur where physicians do very honestly differ in professional sentiment; these differences, if judiciously examined by the parties themselves, might generally be very readily adjusted; but I think I have almost invariably observed that there is a third party, to open, or at least to widen the breach, and if physicians were less heedful of trifling comments, often innocent in themselves, and which are usually misinterpreted, and always magnified, we should hear less of this want of harmony. Let me advise you, gentlemen, when you enter upon the practical duties of life, ever to bear in mind the respect you owe yourselves, and the respect which is due to others—never allow yourselves to be betrayed, even unconsciously, into an unkind word or an unjust comment on a professional brother—pursue the even tenor of your way, and your own good sense will mark out for you

the line of duty and propriety. If in faithfully pursuing such a course you should hear of professional comments on yourself, of criticisms upon your practice, or of severe strictures upon your operations, that they were either too protracted, or perhaps too rapid, and hence more hazardous to the safety of your patient; or even if you should hear of charges of a more serious nature from such a source—do not allow yourselves to be betrayed into any show of feeling; do not stoop to dignify the ebullitions of jealousy and ill feeling with the appellation of slander; betray no irascibility of temper; pass such things by as the idle wind which harms not, and looking down from the proud eminence on which you stand, conscious of the strength of your own position, the correctness of your own actions, and the purity of your own principles, pity the frailties of a weak and erring brother, whilst you may safely leave him to the workings of his own conscience, and the discriminating judgment of the community. Of this you may rest assured, that in the practice of medicine, you will find ample room for the exercise of the benevolent affections; and mildness of manner, gentleness of disposition and evenness of temper, are indispensable requisites in the formation of the character of the good physician. This, therefore, is another argument why you should keep clear of those petty professional squabbles and jealousies, which unhinge and ruffle the temper, and which are only indulged in by men of little minds.

Again, not only are your studies of a character to elevate and refine the feelings, but they are calculated to “raise the genius and to mend the heart”—watch the student as he unravels the mysteries of his own formation; see the complicated yet beautiful machinery of man; mark the perfect symmetry and harmony in the structure and functions of organs; trace those “silver chords” which link the mental

with the corporeal being; observe the perfect adaptation of all its parts to the great purposes of life, and he sees the impress of an Almighty hand, stamped in characters of living light; and in turning from the handiwork, to the contemplation of the Supreme Architect, he is ready to exclaim in the language of the King of Israel, "I will praise thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

Before concluding, I would remark, that when you look around upon the continual changes in the profession of medicine which have been occurring ever since you commenced its study; when you reflect upon the daily progress it is making towards its completion as one of the certain sciences; when you see almost daily some new light thrown upon some one of its branches, as in the art of diagnosis; in pathological anatomy; in the therapeutic application of remedies; some brilliant achievement in the field of surgery, or some new and valuable therapeutic agent from the laboratory of the chemist, or from the indigenous *materia medica* of your own country, the necessity for keeping pace with the progress of improvement, will point to you the necessity of cultivating a knowledge of the periodical literature of the day. Unquestionably great benefit has resulted to the profession, and thereby to the community at large, from the numerous and ably conducted medical journals of our country, through whose columns we have early intelligence of all that is passing in the medical world at home and abroad, and of every new and interesting fact, which we are thus enabled to put early to the test of practice. I would therefore call your attention to the importance of supplying yourselves with one or more of these works immediately on settling down in practice, and as far as your opportunities and ability will enable you, to become an early contributor to them.

Within the last few years, through the instrumentality of these invaluable channels of communication, every branch and every department of science has progressed with gigantic strides—the schoolmaster has indeed been abroad, and he has wandered over an extensive surface—the chemist in his laboratory has unfolded many of the hidden secrets of nature; the mineralogist and the geologist have carried their researches through regions teeming with the richest treasures of creation's God; the botanist has culled the choicest flowers, and twined a wreath of beauty around the Christian's head; the mariner, by square and compass, has traversed in safety the pathless deep; the astronomer has fixed his gaze upon the vaulted canopy of heaven, and the planets in their revolutions, the stars in their fixedness, the sun, the moon, the laws which govern all, are beautifully revealed to us—and with one universal shout, the chemist and the geologist, the mariner and the astronomer, unite in a single voice—**“HALLELUJAH TO THE MOST HIGHEST.”**

It becomes you, therefore, to emulate the bright examples which you daily see around you; to bend all the energies of your mind, in the effort, however feeble, still further to extend research through all the intricacies of learning and of science—and if you go forth with this firm and fixed resolve, you lay a sure foundation for future usefulness—your labors cannot be in vain;—the offerings you may lay upon the altar of science will give you a title to respect and gratitude, and your names will be inscribed among the benefactors of mankind.

Lingering as we are upon the threshold of a moment which must soon be passed—the kindly intercourse which has marked our acquaintance, and the intimate relations which have so long existed between us, so near an end! I feel it is a painful and a trying duty to bid you farewell. Thoughts

of the past come flitting in quick and rapid succession across the pathway of memory—thoughts, too, of the future cannot be repressed. I see you in my mind's eye, each arranging for your separate departure from your beloved Alma Mater—I see, too, the big round tear rise from the deep recess in which you would fain bury it, as you grasp for the last time, the hand of your old college chum—I see the deep heaving of the manly bosom and hear the painful sigh of regret, at parting from preceptors and friends—yet amidst such a scene, which is calculated to soften and subdue our feelings, and to call forth some of the nicer sensibilities of our nature, there is much to cheer and animate us! We behold in the distance the rich bow of hope! the tints of the spectrum are perfect, giving token of the promise!—may it continue to illumine your path in the up-hill of life—may its subdued and steady beams be reflected as you travel downward in the vale of years—and when the summons comes—when the vesper-bell of life is tolled—and when the last trump shall sound, may you be awakened to the enjoyment of the glories of that celestial light, which burns with unfading lustre in the regions beyond the grave!